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SOMEBODY WANTS TO TAKE DOWN NICK LAND

Jonty Tiplady - May 14, 2018 -

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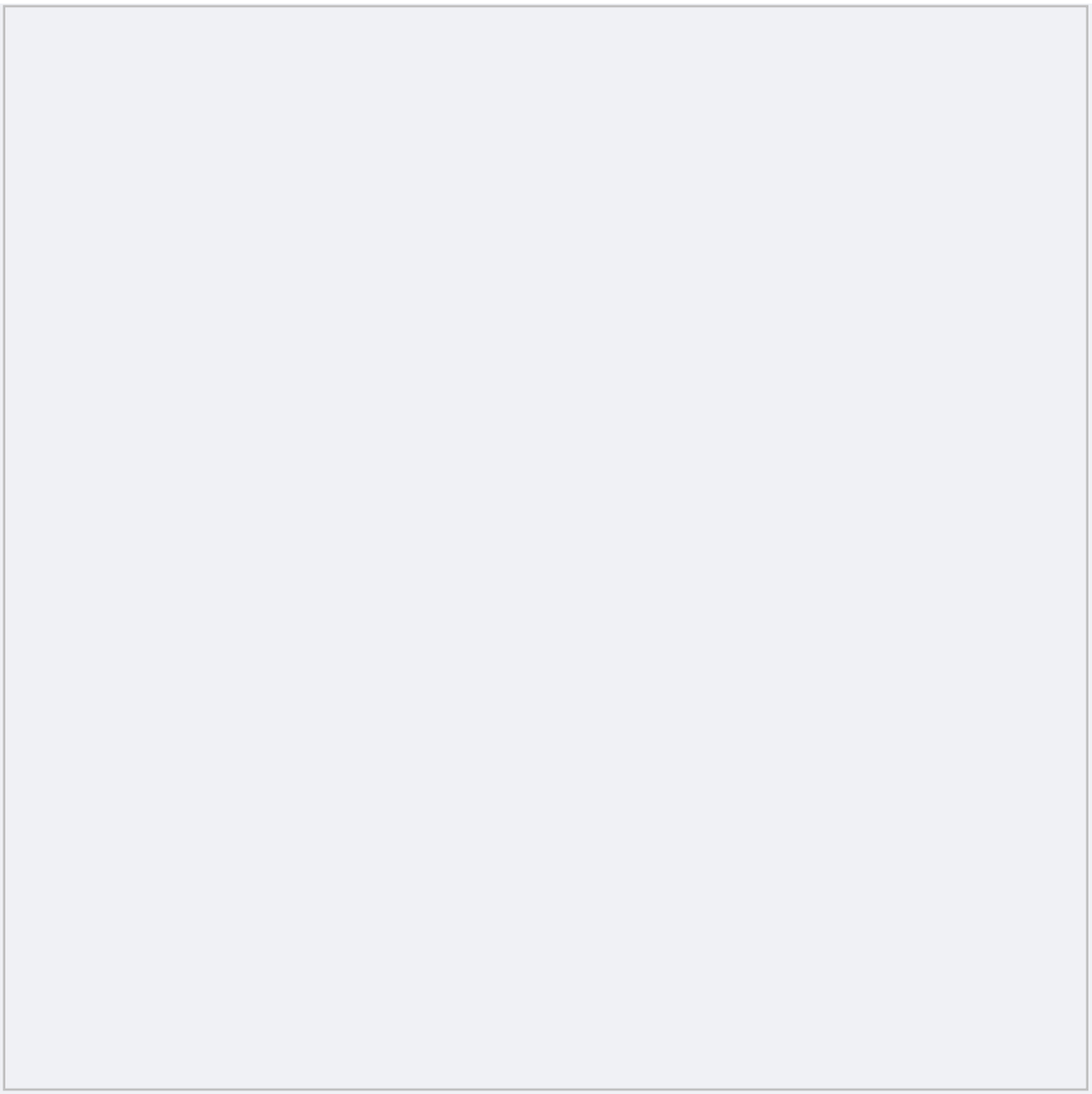

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> *Do you know that entanglement is given in the raciality of the concept, as such?*
>
> —Fred Moten
>
> *Stop thinking about things for a long time without saying what you think*
>
> —Kanye West

Back to early 2017 again, then, whether you like it or not. But because those events never

stopped happening, which is to say because they were never fully read at the time (and so could never fully happen), we are already back there. We never left. We are already and forever 2017.1.

The take-down atmosphere of that time persists, and has mutated into even more fierce signs and symbols. Civilizational sexual hysteria is not the least of them, and hardly to be explained away; rather than a cover for the extinction drive, that hysteria is the *only cover* now available. It pushes the symptom itself one step too far.

Such is the atmosphere *now* and such was the atmosphere *then*: call out or be called out, maul or be mauled. Leave your name lying around and it will be taken. By summer 2018 signs recur and propagate. A certain abstinence of the example is useful. But the rules are clear:

- A large number of online events are now subliminal panic rooms.
- The locales of shunning resonate like empty wounds and tombs.
- The attempt to kick each other out of thought deprives thought itself of its chance.
- Violent disagreement has no opportunity as it goes under and is confused with rage.
- Safety in numbers and collective slamming and in-group/out-group atmospheres are dominant keys of the Oedipal Internet.
- Recursive occlusion/machinal apophenia/platform disindividuation/heuristic abstraction/"paint-shaming."
- Even Marxists understand that Kanye West does not have to read Nick Land to understand him better than anyone else.

In the 2017.1 signscape, the name of "Nick Land" crops up as a failed exorcism. Not only has "Nick Land" not vanished but his name, once purged of the disturbing atmosphere it attracted, becomes fully automated. Envisaged as a hermeneutic traitor to the species by *la petite gauche*—just like Kanye, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and de Man—he stands non-heroically as one of *the* ongoing tests. The remaining challenge to thought is this: perhaps the real reason Land was attacked in early '17 was the sensitivity of his thought to the specter of extinction.

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We will not take sides then. Or rather, we will not only take sides. Those who talk about the "right side of history" or play the ablution game are already off the scent. They will be unable to analyse the whole scene. Virtue and vice-signalling are merely dialectical halves. A space might be imagined where neither is indulged. Where an empty tension is risked.

We will therefore have to repeat the opening of François Laruelle's lesser-known *Nietzsche contra Heidegger* and re-write it for our own times. We might say, for example, that the reader will be challenged by the idea that Land is at *first appearance* a fascist thinker, but that he is

ultimately a thinker of the subversion of fascism; that Land makes himself fascist to overcome fascism; that Land has taken on the worst forms in order to hand them over to a different process; that there is something sacrificial in this bargain. Laruelle writes that,

> *We are all fascist readers of Nietzsche; we are all revolutionary readers of Nietzsche. Our unity is a contradictory relation (hierarchy without mediation), just as the unity of Nietzsche is a contradictory and auto-critical unity.*

We will repeat the same, and find our unity here in this act of accelerative reading that gives the form of every accelerationism to come. We will affirm that there is such a thing as a fascist reader, and that there are ontological modes of fascist thought. This is hardly about you, as reader, says Laruelle, since you are split—you are split between the poles of mastery and rebellion the name "Nietzsche" or the name "Land" or the name "Kanye" represents.

Once you adopt this position, which is already the position that adopts you, you are ready to move beyond both vice and virtue and into the worst. It is here, where the worst takes place, that perhaps nothing changes even when change takes place inside change itself. The absolute worst is possible and that is what a rejected name usually says.

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No doubt the scandalization of Nick Land goes back a long way. His name has always been somewhat folkloric, given to legend and misconstrual. Famed for his drug-fuelled exploits at Warwick in the 90s and for a death-driven book on Bataille, and then for his supposedly straightforward turn to the right, there is perhaps nothing newly shocking in his name. In terms of the controversy in early 2017—let's call it "the Nick Land affair" just to see what happens—an exact moment of inception might at least be given, even if the content fails to be new. It is the moment in the piece "Is It OK To Punch a Nazi (Art Gallery)?", written in February 2017 by the unknown "O.D. Untermesh," when Land's work was associated with an "aura" of "racism." The essay was about the art gallery LD50 and its so-called promotion of a number of "extreme" and "neoreactionary" thinkers including, in the eyes of the piece, Land himself. In a sort of appendix to the essay, there is a clarification of Land's relation to the sort of "fascism" and "racism" the essay is about and criticizes. This part of the article was the moment of inception:

> *Nick Land: One can split hairs by saying that Nick Land isn't a white supremacist and is just into eugenic selection for intelligence so we can survive the coming AI singularity. However, a close reading of his recent*

> *writing reveals he just doesn't like immigrants and black people. He likes Asians because they are deemed to be smart and polite, and he likes Japanese because they've resisted immigration. Racism is an aura around all his other pronouncements.*

An essay exists by Rene Girard called *The First Stone*, which describes the Epheseus stoning recounted in *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus, in which Apollonius leads a crowd to the theatre to stone a beggar when the city is threatened by the plague. Certain aspects of this scapegoat structure are well-known: for example that through the stoning the city is temporarily *purged* and in this sense the act becomes a socially necessary function and even a sort of miracle. Girard lingers with the account given by Philostratus and notices what happens very early on, at the very beginning, "before the first stone is cast." He notes how "Apollonius refrains from mentioning the first stone by name" since if he did this "might increase the resistance to the properly mimetic and mechanical impulse which he wants to trigger." The mechanism is, in other words, to a large extent *automated* and *accelerative*. It is *triggered* and *triggering*. And once *triggered*, there is something unstoppable about it. Not only that, the mechanical drive depends for its power on the unsaid, on the fact that it does not name itself as scapegoating, or as a mechanism to trap and manipulate the crowd. It involves, as it were, a lack of reading and a lack of attention. *Scapegoating is itself an accelerative technology.*

If the case of Nick Land in early 2017 is to be imagined as a historical persecution text then O.D. Untermesh plays the role of Apollonius. The small paragraph on Land is in many ways deceptive, even if "well-intentioned" and backed up by *correct outrage*. The reading implied threatens to be a fantasy: if one does the work of following the implied references, one finds oneself in a maze of Tweets and little else. *Liking Asians because they are deemed to be smart and polite* is not something easily tractable in any of Land's theoretical texts even though it can be gleaned from moments of idly humorous vice-signalling Twitter threads. No real lesson can be drawn here: Land gladly risks losing points to provoke thought; the left risks inaccurate thought in its attraction to nostalgic activism. Both may be haphazard at the level of mutual code incompatibility.

To remain at the level of structural analysis, the paragraph acts as *the first stone*, and the awkwardness of the first stone is that it has to begin the imitative process, what Girard calls mimeticism but which might now easily translate as *memeticism*. Its sleight of hand is to insert Land's work into a list of other thinkers such as Peter Brimelow and Brett Stevens who appear to be the same but are really (so we are told) *also* much more straightforwardly "fascist" and "evil." The paragraph appears to know what it is talking about ("a close reading of his recent writing reveals") and yet self-evidently does nothing to offer that "close reading" or guide the

reader to where it might have occurred. One can go further and say that as if in close alliance with O.D. Untermesh's mechanism, at no point during the "trial" of Nick Land in early 2017 did close reading actually take place. The case against Land would have been a *function* of lack of reading and was itself *about* lack of reading. Because O.D. Untermesh skips the responsibility of reading, everyone else was allowed to do the same and there is a kind of lock-in where argument by passive association and projective scapegoating take the place of actual confrontation.

The importance of this is not that O.D.'s reading of Land was wrong or right, but that in immediately and reactively coming down too heavily on one side, and reducing the tension in Land's work in advance, it both denies the reader the chance to discover different aspects of his work, and, more importantly, prevents us imagining what all of this means as a cultural and accelerative sign. In other words, whatever position one takes, there is no space for non-prejudicial thought. Imagine what might have been prohibited here for the "well-intentioned" reader herself, especially in regard to the thanatography central to Land's work. One question insistently occluded is, and here we take the mechanism to be civilizationally totemic: what is the relation of every contemporary politico-aesthetic scandal to the thinking of death and extinction?

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One speculates that the first stone thrown by O.D. Untermesh was not just the beginning of memetic contagion and a mimetological response to the atmosphere created by Trump, of what Tom Cohen calls "mass resentimentalization," but also a token of resistance in the tradition of what I want to *thanatocentrism*. The clickbait racist controversy consumer is invited to the interpassive online delicatessen according to the following script: go ahead, focus on the tasteless aspects of this or that person's thought if you like, but if the essential prize of that thought is dawning awareness of the extinction(s) now happening and accelerating towards us, and if that awareness has to be prohibited elsewhere, there will always be a counter-force of reading. There will always be what is now called *backlash*. The placement of Trump as a mediatic scapegoat (who himself scapegoats and creates scapegoaters) has a sort of tidal wave effect of micro-mimetological incursions, little waves of almost molecular aggression and lateral distribution of blame, and all of this to assure that death is kept hygienically small. Discourse itself is soaked by the laws of fake reading and projective accelerationism, and is a function of denied extinctophilia. This itself is the technology of the hyperpharmakon that splits 2017 into 2017.1., 2017.2., . . .

When O.D. Untermesh pirouettes out of their paragraph by asserting, "Racism is an aura around all his other pronouncements," there is an exacerbation of this already complex situation. One may query the tidy generalization of "all his other pronouncements," but more interesting may be to reflect an unthought raciality in the very speed of such a judgement and

to wonder how that relates to the possibility of extinction. In the example of Apollonius a stoning shall occur precisely because information has been withheld, and for Girard this always has to do with the denied presence of "collective murder." It is not far from here to the presence of an altogether more collective and universal murder, ongoing and hard to track—and yet flagrant, the extinction drive itself, or the hysteria flagrante delicto of sexual accelerationism—and again for Girard this does not have to be said as such to be there. A working definition of raciality—and I mean the conceptual and experiential feints and occlusions that form all judgments, and how they may now be automated and so impossible to stop—is provided not by the thematic drift of O.D. Untermesh's essay but by their reading style in this one paragraph. Such a definition of raciality would involve first of all a lack of reading, and the very presence of the projective scapegoating mechanism this brief engagement with Land sets in motion, together with a repressive attitude to different and alien definitions of death.

The question will be why focus on the noxious—again we do not simply mean "racist" here, since there is no conclusive answer in this respect (unless you are Nick Land's analyst) and we may be dealing with a projection—aspects of Land's work if as a whole it does not have some other resonance, and what if *not every* statement of his has or *could have* a racist aura? What if, in fact, the main thrust of his work has an entirely other aura and atmosphere, an atmosphere of cold objectivity that always invites the lack of reading here described, which is to say to *scold* it? Is a certain conceptual raciality set up to shut up, shut down and occlude this something else that Land's work names in advance? To what extent is racism fundamentally a denial of personal extinction at the level of reading choices, or even of the fluidity of possible universals? In other words, many aspects of the attempt to criticize Land may themselves be conceptually *biased* in the way they occlude, ignore, refuse to read, and display contempt prior to investigation of what the other is saying and has said about (and this is not just an example) expanded thanatos.

Moreover, if there is a raciality in and of the concept itself, which is to say the presence of juridico-theoretical violence and bias not just in the way we depict other races but in the ways in which we conceptualize the very act of depicting the other's racism, what repercussions does this have, conceptually and experientially, for how someone's body of work relates to itself, early and late, and for how online critique works and fails to work as we go from year to year?

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One can suspect that the recoil of O.D. Untermesh, representing as it does a certain ideology of the British Marxist left, is now broadly diagnostic. The actual identity of O.D. Untermesh remains unknown, but one can pencil it in as both collective and talismanic, or at least representative of a shared thinking. There are not only traces of semio-xenophobia, with Land

taking his place in a long line of names read badly by an old boys network of English theory-baiters, but effects of a generational tendency freeze-framed in wheel spin. This ideology traces back on the English scene to one invariant, which is the idea of the enemy-existence whose extinction is worth anything. In its setting on Mute, the article by O.D. Untermesh recalls not just the return of the repressed social underdog, the *untermensch*, but the spectacular failure of the dominant radical Marxist and often poetic praxis in the UK to mark and self-read the inoperativity of its own desires. Hex, bait, sacrificial victim, stupid Tory, fuck the cops, and so on: however socially necessary these enemies may feel, none of them have worked to stave off any future destruction more broadly. However sophisticated the aesthetic movements that accompany nostalgic activism, their theorization now feels inoperative.

It can be noted that O.D. Untermesh's text also aligns with the attempt of a certain ideology to atone and sublate itself out of its limitations through a turn to racial politics, but in this case a conceptual limit persists and perplexes itself. Nobody understands the need to socially cohere through targeting better than Girard, and yet here, as in Girard, the very addiction to having a target comes into a heavy and belated crisis. Is O.D. Untermesh our own mirror image (so say the English) or Theresa May in Vivienne Westwood drag? Isn't there something a bit too 80s about all this punk rebellion? But the situation is mixed: Land himself was in the beginning utterly English in his adherence to a modernist prose tradition, that of Wyndham Lewis say, and yet is also thoroughly continental (or French) in that particular way that the British Marxist tradition has often found hard to stomach or understand. Perhaps vice-signalling itself is simply part of an aborted colonial-punk contract. Combine this with trace-elements of a provocative theory of eugenics (speed-read) and one can understand the online car crash.

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Land's work from early to late is insistent on the idea that death is never just death, and so may in fact be "A-death," where the "A-" names a muted shift from death to extinction. He has always written close to the *near end of man*, fueled by ateleological scattergram, with an intense awareness of "apocalypse market overdrive" and the collapse of the long-term into a near-term that bears no resemblance to the reefed schizophrenias of various waning socialisms. Why wait to say death, why wait to say extinction? The Landian critique of the discourse of death and its attempt to expand thanatography (in recent work this has taken the form of an emphasis on "the Great Filter") means that his writing demands resistance, and that the more legitimate the reasons for resistance ("authoritarianism," "evil," "racism"), paradoxically, the more that the resistance may cover over. Looking back to early 17, the fact that it so much mattered to proclaim that Land did not matter was but evidence of the extent to which Land's writing is, in effect, a writing that matters.

The critique of thanatography is hard to bear because it always costs recoil and severe adaption. The critical question astir is whether the breakthrough may be achieved without the heroics of a techno-eugenicist *Übermensch* that consign the *untermensch* to second place, hence inviting recoil and industrialized ressentimentalization and the imploding theatricality of overdose (O.D.). If there are two Lands, one who constitutes this breakthrough and one who indulges tasteless appendages, is it possible to hope, based on where we are, that at some point in the future, which is to say now, the two Lands as indexes will be dissociable? The current rage of *la petite gauche* seems reason enough to doubt it. The English avant-gardists are so blinded that they can't even see their proximity to the Cambridge Landianism of Vincent Garton. One can wish for a better index, but this is where we land. The name given, however violent, needs to be read.

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Our contention is that Land's treatment in early 2017 may be indulged as what Rene Girard calls a *historical persecution text*. *In a very profound sense,* Land was a scapegoat for certain pressures and ongoing occlusions that coalesce to make up "the Trumpocene." This statement should be read carefully, with two invisible hands. It does not mean Land necessarily suffered or needs to be defended, for instance. It does not mean we refuse anti-racism as a discourse. But it does mean that we open a space to mark the limits of anti-racism as a mode, and that any body of work that follows through on the thought of a death that is not just that—death now is predominantly extinction—will now always be shunted sideways and produce vivid signals of transference. *Historicist* names the enclosure whereby an underestimation of linguistic irreversibility, and a kind of viral thanatocentrism that dresses itself up behind the correlationist fantasy of criticism, serve, and here is the irony Girard and others tee up for us, to accelerate into inoperativity militant political efforts themselves. The *meaning* of the victim or even epochal gimp threatens to simply escape again and again into the light of the screen, thus victimizing the need of meaning itself and of new names. We forget ourselves and our co-implication through all the rerouting; we forget the status of humans insofar as they are capable of thinking as Land does, and as the non-homogenous Alt-Right does, and this itself seems part of the accelerative bargain. Girard himself locates in the process of victimization a crisis-response and a type of primitive acceleration that closes out:

> *When a society breaks down, time sequences shorten. Not only is there an acceleration of the tempo of positive exchanges that continue only when absolutely indispensable, as in barter for example, but also the hostile or "negative" exchanges tend to increase. The reciprocity of negative rather than positive exchanges becomes foreshortened as it becomes more visible, as witnessed in the reciprocity of insults, blows, revenge, and neurotic symptoms.*

One might draw up a rule here: the less people take the time to analyse what happens each time a problematic name is called out, the more automated (or accelerated) the phenomenon becomes, as if the mechanized agon of the left (angelology) and the right (demonology) were itself part of the way 'time sequences shorten'. Here is Girard again, sounding like a proto-Land:

> *We must think of the monstrous as beginning with the lack of differentiation, with a process that, though it has no effect on reality, does affect the perception of it. As the rate of conflictual reciprocity accelerates, it not only gives the accurate impression of identical behavior among the antagonists but it also disintegrates perception, as it becomes dizzying.*

The monstrous point and the point of the monstrous is that one starts not to see at all. What's at stake is the pain of thought as it attempts to shut out thought through a blizzard of ablution and scandal that replicates what it approaches; call this for example the addiction to Trump itself, the T-function. Land's work, for all its lapsing early on into lurid Bataille fanfic, for all its strategic proximity to vice-signalling, is indexical of this lack of angelic English equanimity, stating where we land now. Here is Girard once more:

> *Once set in motion, the mechanism of evil reciprocity can only become worse for the very reason that all the harm which does not exist at that precise moment is about to become real. At least half of the combatants always believe that justice has been done since they have been avenged, while the other half try to reestablish that same justice by striking those who are provisionally satisfied with a blow that will finally achieve their vengeance.*

One sees the virus of "mass ressentimentalization" that accompanied the key epigenetic moment of the Trumpocene in early 2017, the multiplication of online targets, the mutilation of names that don't cohere with a central and patrolled "radical" sense, and all of this as part of a broader accelerative tendency that takes in both Land's followers on Twitter and those who pretend to be able to oppose him. This mechanism, Girard says, 'can only become worse', and what it constantly represses is the vulnerability of the human itself and its tentative hold on life. What is denied away is the one who if they are not who they are (immigrant, racist, theorist, racial other, human, unconditional accelerationist) will be punishable by effective (internet) death—and yet *who they are* is freighted with such human vulnerability that its meaning is threatened by the attempt to push it out of discourse (and so the attempt is self-

feeding).

The scapegoat is by definition the one who cannot not be the one who they are—at least not before semantic conversion— and so their accusation always portends a crisis of meaning and its covering over. To write of this disavowal-machine is not to hope for its lifting—there seems no sudden surge into positive avowal available —but it is perhaps to know with Land and Girard and others that 'mimetic contagion of collective murder' is already real enough to reach a saturation point of enforced ignorance and non-consciousness. Girard's *The Scapegoat* is already in a sense a post-A.I. text and a description of the degenerescence within the laws of human compassion. Even knowing this may be part of an accelerative epistemology readying itself to be hacked by absolute disavowal, since (Girard again) 'the acceleration of this vortex produces the "victimage" mechanism that brings about its end.' We represent already a drive, an extinction drive (*Aussterbestrieb*), towards a unilateral end of the world, and yet in saying so there is only metaphoric equality and a production of terms. Extinction abstracted from its differences becomes a form before which we are all the same, a Generic Extinction. "Nick Land" is one name, among others, for what that meant.

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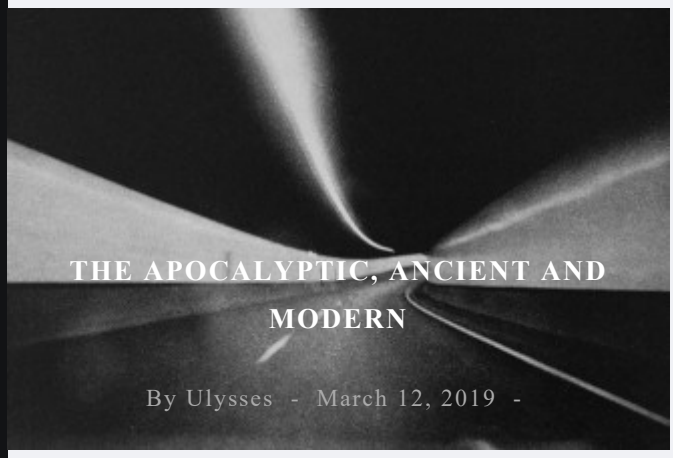

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